DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 961 PS 029 073

AUTHOR	Moles, Oliver C., Ed.
TITLE	Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools. Beginning of the School Year Activities.
INSTITUTION	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	MIS-2000-6520
PUB DATE	2000-11-00
NOTE	29p.; For 1996 edition, see ED 400 117.
AVAILABLE FROM	ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398; Tel: 877-433-7827 (Toll-Free); Tel: 877-576-7734 (TTY/TTD); Fax: 301-470-1244.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Family School Relationship; Home Visits; *Outreach Programs; Parent Responsibility; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Conferences; *Parent Teacher Cooperation
IDENTIFIERS	Open Houses

ABSTRACT

Noting that the beginning of the school year is a key time to communicate with parents, this booklet presents accumulated knowledge and fresh ideas on school outreach strategies for this important time period. The suggestions for action within each strategy are based on broad experience, which can help even seasoned teachers, principals, and district officials do a better job of making their schools family-friendly. The specific activities detailed are: (1) early fall mailings, including welcome letters and calendars; (2) home-school handbooks, including content and preparation; (3) open house, including publicity and planning; (4) school-parent compacts; (5) parent-teacher conferences; and (6) home visits, including planning and strategies. The booklet concludes with a list of services of the U.S. Department of Education and information on the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. (HTH)

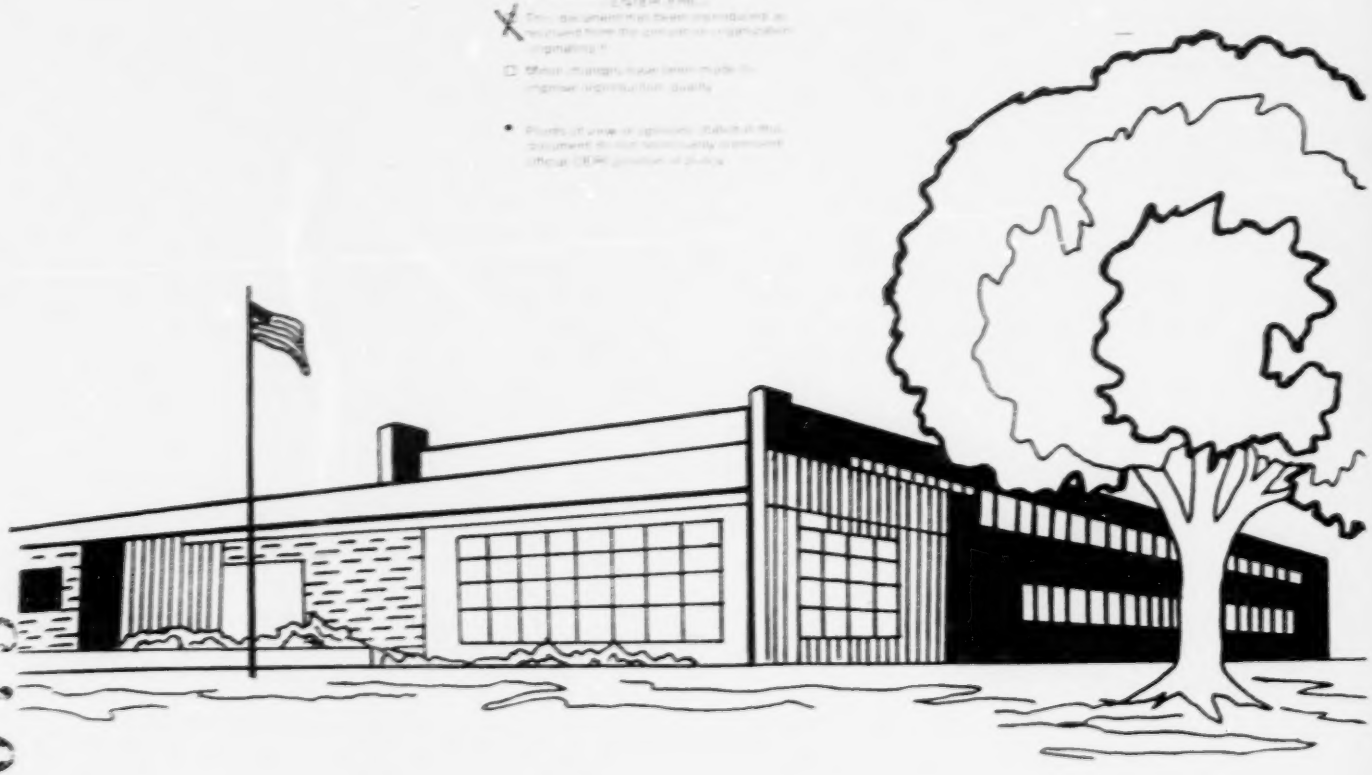
Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 447 981

Reaching All Families

Creating Family-Friendly Schools

Beginning of the School Year Activities



PS 029043

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Customer Survey of OERI Publication Users

To help us improve future editions of this publication and give you better customer service, we would appreciate your comments on this survey form. Please check the appropriate box(es) below for each question. Responses will be kept completely confidential. You may return the survey by mail or FAX. It can be folded and taped closed to allow mailing to the address listed on the reverse side of this form, or it can be returned by FAX to 202–219–1321. Many thanks for your customer feedback—it is very important to us!

1a. Name of publication

1b. Publication number

1c. Author name

2. How did you receive a copy of this publication?

- ❑ Bought it
- ❑ Borrowed it
- ❑ Mailing list membership
- ❑ Telephone request
- ❑ Internet request
- ❑ Other (please describe)

3. Was this publication easy to get?

❑ Very ❑ Somewhat ❑ Not at all

4. How did you find out about this and other OERI publications? (Check all that apply.)

- ❑ Conferences
- ❑ Journal articles
- ❑ Teacher/educator
- ❑ Professional associations
- ❑ Internet (WWW)
- ❑ Publication announcement
- ❑ Received in mail
- ❑ OERI staff contact

5. For what purposes did you use this OERI publication? (Check all that apply.)

- ❑ Planning
- ❑ Policy or legislation
- ❑ Administrative decisions
- ❑ Teaching, class material
- ❑ Research/analysis
- ❑ General information
- ❑ Writing news articles, TV or radio material
- ❑ Marketing, sales, or promotion
- ❑ Other (please describe)

6. Did the publication help you accomplish whatever you needed it for?

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Partially

7. What is your occupation?

❑ Parent ❑ Teacher ❑ Administrator
❑ Librarian ❑ Researcher ❑ Statistician
❑ Journalist/writer ❑ Policy Analyst ❑ Student
❑ Program Planner
❑ Other (please specify)

8. How could this OERI publication (or other OERI publications) better meet your needs? (Check all that apply.)

- ❑ More important topics in education
- ❑ More timely release of data
- ❑ More text introductions to each section
- ❑ More research statistics
- ❑ Shorter reports (less than 10 pages)
- ❑ Other (please describe)

9. Overall, how satisfied are you with this product?	**Very Satisfied**	**Satisfied**	**Dissatisfied**
	❑	❑	❑
a. Comprehensiveness of information	❑	❑	❑
b. Clarity of writing (readability, interpretability)	❑	❑	❑
c. Clarity of presentation (e.g., tables, charts)	❑	❑	❑
d. Timeliness of information	❑	❑	❑
e. Accuracy of information	❑	❑	❑
f. Clarity of technical notes	❑	❑	❑
g. Usefulness of resources and bibliography	❑	❑	❑
h. Organization	❑	❑	❑
i. Length	❑	❑	❑
j. Format	❑	❑	❑

PAPERWORK BURDEN STATEMENT
Office of Education Research and Improvement (OERI)
Publication Customer Survey

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1880-0529. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 10 minutes per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collection. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy of the time estimate(s), suggestions for improving this form, or concerns regarding the status of your individual submission of this form, write directly to: **P. Quinn, Room 204, Media and Information Services, OERI, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20208-5570.**

OERI Publication Customer Survey
Media and Information Services
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20202

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, $300

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 012935 WASHINGTON DC

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

U.S. Department of Education
Mail Code: 5570
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20277—2935

Fold on line—TAPE CLOSED—DO NOT STAPLE

10. Do you have any suggestions regarding the content or format of future editions of this publication or other comments?

MIS 1999-6532

Reaching All Families

Creating Family-Friendly Schools

Beginning of the School Year Activities

Edited by
Oliver C. Moles

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement

U.S. Department of Education
Richard W. Riley
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
C. Kent McGuire
Assistant Secretary

Media and Information Services
Cynthia Hearn Dorfman
Director

November 2000

This book is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce the book in whole or in part for educational purposes is granted.

The contents of this booklet were prepared by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. Listing of materials and resources in this book should not be construed or interpreted as an endorsement by the Department of any private organization or business listed therein.

To obtain copies of this book (while supplies last) or ordering information on other U.S. Department of Education products, call toll free 1–877–4ED–Pubs (877–433–7827), or write:

U.S. Department of Education
ED Pubs
P.O. Box 1398
Jessup, MD 20794–1398

TTY/TTD: 1–877–576–7734
FAX: 301–470–1244

Contents

Foreword vii

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

Beginning of the School Year Activities 3

- Early Fall Mailings 4
- Home-School Handbooks 5
- Open House 7
- School-Parent Compacts 10
- Parent-Teacher Conferences 11
- Home Visits 14

Services of the Department 16

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education 18

Foreword

It is well known that when families, educators, and communities all work together, schools get better and students get the high quality education they need to lead productive lives. Education is about discovering the special skills and talents of children and guiding their learning according to high standards.

For me the important and positive news in education is the critical role parents have in developing their children's learning habits. A recent Department report, *Reading Literacy in the United States,* tells us that there is a substantial gap in the reading scores between schools that involve parents and schools that do not. Principals, teachers, and parents should take heed.

Parents are the essential link in improving American education, and schools simply have to do a better job of reaching out to them. Sending a report card home is not enough. Parents want to help their children succeed in school, and often need guidance on how to be most effective.

This publication is designed for school administrators and teachers, to help them involve parents and families as more active participants in their children's education. The strategies suggested here are appropriate for all students, including students with special needs.

A special emphasis is placed on making all school contacts friendly and welcoming to the diverse families being served. A variety of possible school strategies are discussed. Here are some straightforward suggestions for helping to involve families, both as partners at back-to-school time and throughout the school year.

Richard W. Riley
Secretary of Education

Acknowledgments

This booklet represents the work of many people. It includes the educators, parents, and community representatives who shared information on promising approaches and programs while helping the Massachusetts Department of Education create the original strategy fact sheets. Various units within the Department also shared information on how they promote parent involvement, as did several nearby schools. Finally, teams of principals, teachers, and parents from 21 communities shared strategies and program ideas on communication and outreach to "hard to reach" families.

Special thanks go to Barbara Aschheim of the Massachusetts Department of Education for information on the fact sheets and encouragement to use them, to Diane D'Angelo for providing a computer copy of the sheets, to Judith Anderson, Adriana de Kanter, and Terry Peterson who offered many good suggestions for the original adaptation in *Reaching All Families,* to Menahem Herman and Lorraine Wise for their suggestions on this extract from *Reaching All Families*, to Linda Darby for her suggestions and editing on this extract from *Reaching All Families*, and to Phil Carr for typesetting. Finally, this booklet is dedicated to the memory of Ross Zerchykov, a longtime advocate for citizen participation in education who was a developer of the original fact sheets.

Introduction

This booklet presents accumulated knowledge and fresh ideas on school outreach strategies for the beginning of the school year. It is extracted and updated from the larger booklet *Reaching All Families* (1996). The suggestions for action within each strategy are based on broad experience, which can help even seasoned teachers, principals, and district officials do a better job of making their schools family-friendly.

Research on parent and school connections. Many parents prepare their children well for school on their own and contact the schools as needed. Working with such parents requires little effort. But there are many others who want to help their children learn more, yet do not come to school. This fact should not be taken as evidence that they do not care about their children's education (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Epstein, 1983; Moles, 1993). Fathers are important too; when they are highly involved at school, their children do much better schoolwork (National Center for Fathering, 2000).

Job and family demands leave little free time for many parents. Others who stay away tend to be racial and ethnic minorities, and those who have less income and less ease with the English language. Their children are more often at risk of failing in school (Smith et al., 1995). In growing up, these parents may also have had negative school experiences. Involving such hard to reach families is a challenge.

It may seem surprising, but surveys show that most parents, regardless of their background, want guidance from the schools on ways to help their children learn more (Chavkin & Williams, 1989; Epstein, 1986). On the other hand, educators are seldom trained to work with parents (Shartrand et al., 1997). Thus information in this booklet can provide useful direction. Making parents feel welcomed by the school is the first step to helping them.

Studies show that activities initiated by the school to change the home educational environment can have a strong influence on school performance, especially in schools serving low-income and minority families (Graue, Weinstein & Walberg, 1983; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Leler, 1983; Moles, 1993). According to parents such assistance is more common today but still far from universal (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Strategies, which encourage two-way communication through personal contacts, are especially important. If families are to be involved as true partners in their children's education, it is important to provide ongoing opportunities to hear their concerns and comments, as well as providing them information.

Title I schools. Schools which participate in the federal Title I program may be able to use Title I funds to pay for activities related to some outreach strategies. These activities include training for school staffs on outreach and building partnerships with parents, translation of school information, arranging for educators to conduct in-home conferences, if necessary, and reducing or paying transportation and child-care costs so parents can participate in school-related meetings and training sessions.

Section 1118 of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 describes both recommended strategies and parent involvement requirements. School districts that receive $500,000 or more in Title I funds must devote at least 1 percent of their funds for parent involvement and related

activities. Those that receive less must still follow the requirements found in section 1118. Schools should contact their local education agency for assistance. For more information on the parent involvement aspects of Title I, call (202) 260-1406 or visit the Title I Web Site at *www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/CEP/programs.html.* Click on Parent Involvement.

Using this booklet. This publication is designed for easy use by teams of teachers and administrators. Some of the strategies apply to school-level activities. These strategy sheets might be given to the staff persons in charge of each activity. Other strategies may be useful to all teachers or other members of the staff. Schools may want to reproduce some of these strategy sheets to make them widely available. There is no copyright on this booklet.

The Department's Partnership. This booklet is produced in collaboration with the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, a joint endeavor of the U.S. Department of Education and more than 6,000 family, education, community, religious, and business organizations dedicated to developing family-school-community partnerships for learning to high standards. Two other Department publications, *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (1994) and *Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches (1997)*, provide additional examples on how schools can reach out to families. For more information on the Partnership, call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit the Web site at http://pfie.ed.gov. An overview of the Partnership and how to join appear at the back of this booklet.

References

Chavkin, N.F., & Williams, D.L. Jr. (1989). Low-income Parents' Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement in Education. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare.*

Epstein, J.L. (1983). *Effects on Parents of Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement.* Report No. 346. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools.

Epstein, J.L. (1986). Parents' Reactions to Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement. *Elementary School Journal* 86, 3 (January).

Grave, M.E., Weinstein, T., & Walberg, H.J. (1983). *School-based Home Instruction and Learning: A Quantitative Synthesis.* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association meetings, April 1983.

Henderson, A.T., & Berla, N. (1994). *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement.* Washington, DC: National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Leler, H. (1983). Parent Education and Involvement in Relation to the Schools and to Parents of School-aged Children. In R. Haskins and D. Adams (eds.) *Parent Education and Public Policy.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Moles, O.C. (1993). Collaboration Between Schools and Disadvantaged Parents: Obstacles and Openings. In N. Chavkin (ed.) *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

National Center for Fathering. (2000). *A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Shartrand, A.M., Weiss, H.D., Kreider, H.M. & Lopez, M.E. (1997). *New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Smith, T.M. et al. (1995). *The Condition of Education 1995.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics.

U.S. Department of Education. (1997). *Family Involvement in Children's Education: Successful Local Approaches. An Idea Book.* Washington, DC: author.

U.S. Department of Education. (2000). *Fiscal Year 2000 Annual Plan. Volume 1.* Washington, DC: author.

U.S. Department of Education. (1996). *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools.* Washington, DC: author.

U.S. Department of Education. (1994). *Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning.* Washington, DC: author.

Beginning of the School Year Activities

The beginning of the school year is a key time to communicate with parents. Some will be new to the school. All will want to know what to expect from schools and new teachers, and how they can help their children learn.

Early school contacts introduce parents to school goals and expectations for their children. They alert parents to important school policies and programs. Early contacts also send a message that right from the start schools welcome all families and expect them to be partners in the education of their children—regardless of background or abilities.

Schools can send these messages in a variety of ways. Open house is one opportunity. Even before that, early fall mailings can welcome, inform, and encourage parents to work with schools for their children's education. These mailings might include a home-school handbook, a reading list, and an invitation to join in developing or signing a school-parent compact. This compact would form the basis for a partnership between the school and the parent to share responsibility for high student performance.

To get better acquainted with parents and their interests, nothing beats face-to-face contacts. Parent-teacher conferences are standard fare in most schools. Early home visits are not common, but an excellent way to open up communication between teachers and parents. Tips on how to develop and strengthen each of these strategies are provided on the following pages.*

*For more information on a variety of activities that schools can mount at the beginning of the school year, see *America Goes Back to School: Organizer's Kit 2000-01*, a packet of materials from the U.S. Department of Education. For a copy call 1-877-4ED-PUBS.

Early Fall Mailings

At the beginning of the school year, there is much to communicate to parents. A variety of channels may be needed to do this. An early fall mailing to parents or guardians is one convenient way to convey important information to all families and to solicit their input.

Welcome Letters

Welcome letters are generally sent home by teachers at the beginning of the school year or when a new student enrolls. Some items for these letters might include

- a list of basic subjects and broad plans for the year;
- a list of materials and supplies students will need for class;
- a telephone number and time when the teacher can be reached;
- homework hotline number if the school has one;
- an invitation to share concerns and an offer to provide assistance to parents as they help their child with after-school work; and
- a list of programs that students can participate in after school and how to apply.

Remember to use clear, simple language and short sentences so that all can understand.

Assume that mothers *and* fathers will be interested, and address it to both parents. If non-custodial parents can be reached and the custodial parent is willing, send a welcome letter to non-custodial parents also.

Information Packets

These materials can be distributed at back-to-school night or open house in the fall. Schools often mail these items to all parents who do not pick them up at the open house.

- School handbooks and information sheets can contain updated descriptions of school policies and special programs. They also can list services offered by the school and telephone numbers of school officials, parent leaders, and room parents. See the section on home-school handbooks.
- If the school, district, or community has a school-home connection through a local cable channel, e-mail, or homework hotline, highlight how it can be easily accessed.

Calendars

Monthly or school year calendars highlight upcoming school events and meetings. Here are some tips for calendar preparation:

- Calendars can be designed to be posted conveniently on the refrigerator door. Some include ideas for each day on ways families can help children learn. For example, "Have your child identify the items in the kitchen that are square, oblong, and triangular."
- Television programs or movies that the family may enjoy together can be noted.
- Upcoming community events for families can be listed.
- Supplements with more information and event schedules can be mailed later.

Home-School Handbooks

The home-school handbook provides families with a handy information packet about the school. Handbooks help parents understand school policies and programs, and become aware of the ways they and their children can be involved in the school.

Content

A home-school handbook serves as the school's calling card, establishing a tone for its relations with its families. It also serves as a parents' Yellow Pages, providing all the basic information they need. But make sure all telephone numbers, dates, and locations are up to date. Handbooks might contain the following:

- Statement of school goals and philosophy.
- Discipline policy and code.
- Operations and procedures regarding
  - grades and pupil progress reports;
  - absence and tardiness;
  - how to inquire about student difficulties;
  - emergency procedures for weather and other events; and
  - transportation schedules and provisions for after-school activities.
- Special programs at the school such as after-school enrichment or child care programs.
- Parent involvement policies and practices at the school and district levels with items that describe
  - "Bill of Rights" for parents;
  - "Code of Responsibilities" for parents;
  - parent-teacher conferences; and
  - involvement opportunities, such as volunteer programs, advisory councils, and PTAs.
- School-parent compact.
- A calendar of major school events throughout the year: holidays, vacations, regular PTA meetings, report card periods, open houses, and other regularly scheduled school-home contacts.
- Names and telephone numbers of key school contact people.
- Names and telephone numbers of parent leaders (e.g., members of advisory councils, key people in parent organizations, and room parents).
- A tear-off response form allowing parents to ask questions, voice concerns, and volunteer at the school.
- Community organizations and businesses working in partnership with the school.
- The toll-free number for U.S. Department of Education publications that address issues of concern to parents (1-877-4ED-PUBS).

The handbook could be distributed at school-wide gatherings, such as back-to-school night or open house and parent-teacher meetings, or through the mail to those who do not attend. The main

idea is to get the handbook to everyone early in the school year and discuss it briefly when it is presented.

While it is tempting to include as much information as possible, avoid making a handbook too long; otherwise many parents will put it aside.

Handbook Preparation

Handbooks that are prepared collaboratively by administrators, teachers, and parents are able to reflect the interests of each group. If administrators develop the book, they may want to ask teachers, parent representatives, student associations, and others to review it in draft form.

Other tips for successful handbook preparation:

- Use clear, simple language that avoids educational jargon.
- Use in-service days to familiarize staff with the handbook so they can be effective in using it with parents.
- Translate the handbook into the languages spoken by school parents.
- Make sure teachers, and parent and student leaders, approve of and understand the content of the handbook.

Open House

Schools need to share information about their programs with all parents. One widespread approach is the open house or back-to-school night. It is a great way to welcome all families to the school. Because of the limited time and number of parents who usually attend open house, it is not a good time for in-depth discussion of students' progress. But it is an excellent way to give parents an overview of the school, its programs, and expectations for students.

The open house works best if schools:

- Hold them at the beginning of the school year, or even on the first day of school (see page 11).
- Schedule them at times of low "calendar conflict."
- Attend to the 3 P's—publicity, planning, and preparation.

Publicity

A carefully thought-out publicity campaign is essential to success. The open house should be scheduled about a month after classes start so that teachers are somewhat familiar with their students, and there is time to contact all parents. Districts need to hold their schools' open house or back-to-school night on different evenings so parents with children in more than one school and teachers who have school-age children can attend each one.

The most important element in success is to set an expectation among all students that their parents will attend. The following strategies may be helpful in a publicity campaign:

- Have students design personal invitations to the event for their parents.
- Mail every parent or guardian an invitation from the school, which explains in detail the event and what they can expect to learn.
- Note on the invitation, the transportation and child-care arrangements that the school will provide (if any).
- Hang posters developed by classes of students in local grocery stores, banks, and the public library.
- Set aside time for teachers and parent volunteers to call all parents, particularly new parents, a day or so before the event to personally invite them.
- Use the public announcement system to remind all students on the day of the event that the school staff is eager to meet their parents that evening at the open house.

Planning

Open houses or back-to-school nights are successful when they meet the real needs of parents. The best way to insure success is to involve parents in the planning process. Open-house programs could include:

- A welcoming session, led by the principal, introducing the teaching staff and the school's philosophy.
- Time for parents to meet in their children's classrooms and hear about the year's curriculum and the teachers' expectations. En-

courage parents to try some of the student activities.

- A chance to meet and talk with children's teachers. Allow enough time for questions.

- First year incoming secondary school students and their parents invited to a pre-first day of school meeting. At that time, students could receive a planner for doing class assignments, locate classrooms, and be more prepared for school opening. Bullets one and two would be on the agenda.

- Open houses can also include an opportunity for teachers to

    - demonstrate some of the activities which will take place in their classrooms;
    - describe the kinds of assistance they would like from parents both at home and volunteering at school; and
    - give parents a chance to ask questions about the upcoming school year.

Preparation

The school will want to convey a warm and inviting atmosphere to parents and insure that teacher and staff presentations are informative and enjoyable. The administrative team can contribute to the success of the open house by

- arranging to direct parents with clearly marked signs and support staff around the building;

- making sure arrangements for child care and transportation run smoothly;

- providing translators for parents who do not speak English;

- arranging for a display table that has copies of the school's annual report, handbooks, discipline codes, and other items of interest to parents;

- requesting art classes to prepare a welcome sign for parents and put artwork all around the school;

- requesting that bulletin boards are bright and up to date; and

- encouraging band and chorus classes to play and sing in small groups around the school before and after the open-house activities.

Teachers can help by

- making clear, brief presentations about the curriculum and teacher expectation for class work, homework and behavior;

- giving parents suggestions for helping students at home;

- preparing handouts for parents that reinforce their presentations and include upcoming class topics, field trips and special events, best contact times and means, etc.; and

- increasing parent enjoyment of the open house with techniques such as

    - displaying unfinished student work to give parents a sneak preview of what's in store for their children;
    - giving parents a chance to complete a few of the activities on which their children have been working;
    - inviting children to conduct a few learning activities with their parents; and
    - telling humorous stories about past students or times to put parents at ease and show one is approachable.

One variation of the open house or back-to-school night is a First Day of School "Holiday." Employers are encouraged to give working parents time off to go to school with their children. Parents and teachers meet and set the time for continuing school-family partnerships. Students see that parents and teachers are aligned, and the community celebrates education. (Contact the First Day Foundation at 1-877-FIRST-DAY for information.)

School-Parent Compacts

Many schools are developing voluntary agreements between the home and school to define goals, expectations, and shared responsibilities of schools and parents as partners in student learning. In fact the federal Title I program under the Improving America's Schools Act requires all participating schools to develop with their Title I parents a compact as a component of the school-level parent involvement policy. The compact outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share responsibility for improved student achievement, and how the school and parents will build partnerships to help children achieve to the state's high standards.

Compacts incorporate the unique ideas and activities of different school communities. They usually have sections that identify what schools, parents, and their children will do. Signing of the school-parent compact is not required. As an example, the Title I requirements are paraphrased below.

School responsibilities (1) describe how the school will provide high quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables students to meet the state's student performance standards, and (2) note the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis by such means as

- parent-teacher conferences in elementary schools, including discussion of how the compact relates to the child's achievement;
- frequent reports to parents on their children's progress; and
- reasonable access to staff, to observe classroom activities, and to volunteer and participate in their child's class.

Parent responsibilities indicate some ways that parents can support their children's learning by

- monitoring school attendance, homework completion, and television watching;
- volunteering in their child's classroom; and
- taking part, as appropriate, in decisions on the education of their children and constructive use of extracurricular time.

Student involvement in developing the compact ensures that a more student-focused statement is included demonstrating support of home and school learning responsibilities.

Compacts need to be used in combination with other family involvement activities, not as the only way schools communicate and work with parents. They are more likely to be effective when well planned, appropriate to the situation, sensitive to individual and community needs, flexible, and accompanied by supports of money, time, and teacher and parent training. More importantly, effectiveness is achieved when they are developed jointly with parents of students in the school.

The U.S. Department of Education has produced a booklet on compacts with examples from schools around the country. Title I and other schools may want to get a copy of *A Compact for Learning*. This action handbook covers developing a compact, its use, and evaluation. For more information on school-parent compacts and a copy of this handbook call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Regular parent-teacher conferences for all families are an essential building block of home-school communication. Parents provide important perspectives and information that can be extremely valuable. Teachers need the help of parents to do the best possible job of educating every child and can help parents play an active role in education at home. Conferences are a time for listening and sharing. They can reinforce the idea of working as a team.

Conferences also provide an opportunity for teachers to explain the criteria and grades used on report cards. In fact, many schools schedule conferences right after a reporting period. Some use the conference itself as the means to distribute report cards.

Conferences are successful when teachers and the school system create a climate that invites collaboration with parents. Creating this climate involves planning and effort. The following suggestions indicate ways teachers, principals, and school systems can maximize the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences.

Before the Conference

Principals and District Officials—Principals and district officials play a critical role by coordinating activities and providing encouragement to teachers. Some organizing principles are suggested.

Prepare Teachers for Conferences

- Use in-service meetings to orient teachers to the system's goals and effective procedures for conferences.
- Role playing exercises can help teachers, especially new teachers, to anticipate and deal positively with typical parent questions.

Allocate Resources

- Allot sufficient time for teachers to conduct conferences and provide substitutes if added time is needed.
- Provide child care and refreshments, and transportation if needed.
- Arrange translation services and let parents know that they are available.
- Develop a flexible conference schedule that will provide options for working parents and parents who have more than one child in the school.

Involve Parents Well in Advance

- Let parents know about upcoming conferences through various channels—letters, newsletters, radio and television announcements, PTA meetings, and community cable television channels.
- Survey parents to identify their areas of concern.
- Send parents a conference-planning sheet, which outlines a set of questions they may want to ask teachers.
- Ask parent volunteers to telephone parents to confirm their conference times and encourage them to attend.

Teachers—The role of teachers in arranging conferences involves planning and preparation. Some tips on preparation include

- Contact parents well in advance to arrange the conference.
- Send a personal letter or make a phone call outlining a specific but brief agenda that will interest the parents.
- Indicate that individual conferences are being held with all parents, and how important they are.
- Encourage parents to review class work brought home and to note questions, concerns, and comments to bring to the conference.
- Prepare for the conference by developing a conference folder with samples of the student's work and a list of the teacher's concerns and questions.
- Create a comfortable and private physical environment with enough adult-sized chairs and no desk to separate teacher from parent.

During the Conference

Establish Rapport with Parents—Develop a relationship with parents by asking them about their work or about an interest you may know they have.

Accept Parents as Advocates—Provide parents with opportunities to speak about their children. Do not interpret a parent's advocacy as belligerence or as a criticism.

Emphasize the Positive—Indicate appreciation of the unique qualities of the child.

- Research suggests that parents use a teacher's knowledge of their child's personality or interests as a screening device. They are more willing to listen to a range of feedback about their child if they hear the teacher comment on the child's special qualities first.
- Recount a brief anecdote or story about the child before sharing positive or negative information on the child's performance.

Establish Priorities—Pick one or two areas for growth and improvement so parents are not overwhelmed.

Learn From the Parents—Together, parents and teachers make a great team for student learning.

- Involve parents in creating solutions to problems.
- Devote at least half the conference to parents' concerns, ideas, and questions.

Action Steps—Close the conference with some action steps.

- Identify concrete suggestions for how the parents and the teacher will together help the child.
- Emphasize the parents' role in the education of the child, and ways the teacher can assist them.
- Provide resources and materials such as booklets that families can use at home to build student skills.
- Give parents specific times when they may call you.
- Plan to meet again if advisable.

After the Conference

- Keep brief notes about the conference; follow through and remember parents' concerns.
- Note and address any suggestions made and questions raised during the conference.
- Keep parents informed of any steps that you or other school personnel have taken and follow up with parents on actions that they were going to take.
- Share non-confidential helpful information about students and their families with colleagues, and seek the same from them.
- Contact other school staff where issues discussed involve their work.
- Follow-up the conference with a phone call or a note to all parents to show commitment to working as a team.

Home Visits

A home visiting program can show that the teachers, principals, and school staff are willing to "go more than halfway" to involve all parents in their children's education. Home visits help teachers demonstrate their interest in students' families and understand their students better by seeing them in their home environment.

These visits should not replace parent-teacher conferences or be used to discuss children's progress. When done early before any school problems can arise, they avoid putting any parents on the defensive and signal that teachers are eager to work with all parents. Teachers who have made home visits say they build stronger relationships with parents and their children, and improve attendance and achievement.

Planning

Administrators, teachers, and parents must agree to participate in the program and be involved in planning and organizing it.

These programs are successful when:

- they include a parent liaison or other community member;
- teachers' schedules are adjusted so that they have the necessary time;
- home visits are scheduled during just one month of the school year, preferably early;
- visits are logged so that teachers and administrators can measure their benefits; and
- visits are welcomed by the families.

Strategies for Successful Home Visits

Who does the visiting?—Wherever possible, teachers should visit homes of children in their classes. If this is not possible, the principal should ensure that every home that requests a visit receives one.

If teachers do not speak the parents' language, a translator needs to accompany them.

Scheduling—These suggestions my be helpful:

- Some schools have scheduled home visits in the afternoon right after school. Others have found that early evening is more convenient for parents. Some schedule visits right before a new school year begins. A mix of times may be needed to reach all families.

- Teachers should be given flexibility to schedule their visits during the targeted time period.

- Teachers of siblings may want to visit these children's homes together, but take care not to overwhelm parents.

- Some schools work with community groups (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, housing complexes, 4-H, Y's, churches and community centers) to schedule visits in neutral but convenient space.

Making parents feel comfortable—Here are some useful tips:

- Send a letter home to parents explaining the desire to have teachers make informal visits to all students' homes. Include a form that parents can mail back to accept or decline the visit.

- The letter should state clearly that the intent of this 15-30 minute visit is only to introduce the teacher and family members to each other, and not to discuss the child's progress.

- The letter might suggest that families think about special things their children would want to share with the teacher.

- The tone of the letter should try to lessen any parents' worries. One school included a note to parents which said, "No preparation is required. In fact, our homes need to be vacuumed and all of us are on diets!" This touch of humor and casualness helped to set a friendly and informal tone.

- A telephone call to parents who have not responded can explain the plan for home visits and reassure parents that it is to get acquainted and not to evaluate students.

- Enlist community groups, religious organizations, and businesses to help publicize the home visits.

Services of the Department

The U.S. Department of Education promotes more family involvement in learning through a variety of means. The following resources may be helpful to schools.

Monthly Satellite Town Meetings

Satellite Town Meetings on education are co-sponsored by the National Alliance of Business. These interactive meetings give you the chance to share ideas about improving education with other Americans in communities all across the nation. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for information.

Community Update

These newsletters are monthly publications that will keep you current on education news, including family involvement activities, and alert you to what other communities are doing to make their schools better. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for information.

Family-Friendly Schools

Sign on as a family-friendly school. The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education needs your school. See the School-Family Partnership Promise at the back of this booklet.

Parent Resource Centers

Parent Information and Resource Centers have been established in all states to provide training, information, and support to parents and those who work with them from birth through high school. Network with the center in your state or a nearby state. Call (202) 401-0039 for center locations and information.

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

Get the latest research information on education issues from AskEric@EricIR.syr.edu or call 1-800-LET-ERIC.

Online Library

Information about what works in partnerships is available from the U.S. Department of Education's online library: http://www.ed.gov

Related Publications

The following publications can be ordered free of charge from the U.S. Department of Education by calling 1-877-4ED-PUBS or 1-800-USA-LEARN.

America Goes Back to School: Organizer's Kit 2000-01.

Strong Families, Strong Schools: Building Community Partnerships for Learning. A research base for family involvement in learning from the U.S. Department of Education.

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education: Who We Are and What We Do.

Questions Parents Ask About Schools (in English and Spanish).

A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning.

New Skills for New Schools: Preparing Teachers in Family Involvement.

A Compact for Reading Guide: A Reading Partnership Action Kit.

After-School Programs: Keeping Children Safe and Smart.

Yes, You Can: A Guide for Establishing Mentoring Programs to Prepare Youth for College.

Education Information at Your Fingertips: Toll-free Numbers and Web Sites from the U.S. Department of Education.

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

"Better Education Is Everybody's Business"
—U. S. Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley

PARTNERSHIP for Family Involvement in Education

What We Do

The Partnership's mission and activities

- Increase opportunities for families to be more involved in their children's learning at school and at home.
- Strengthen schools and improve student achievement levels.

Who We Are We are thousands of partners joined together in a growing grassroots movement to support student learning according to high standards. We come from families, schools, and a variety of businesses, communities, and religions, and are organized into four groups: Family-School Partners, Employers for Learning, Community Organizations, and Religious Groups.

The Benefits of Joining

- Connect with other groups to share ideas about educating our nation's children;
- Work together to increase and improve efforts to help children learn;
- Get the latest information about family involvement in education and related activities; and
- Receive recognition for visible commitments to education at the local, state, and national levels.

Local Activities of Partners

At the local level, partners support efforts to:

- Strengthen family-school partnerships through good communication and mutual responsibility for children's learning;
- Adopt family- and student-friendly business practices;
- Provide before- and after-school learning activities for children;
- Make effective use of facilities-schools, community buildings, churches – for children and families; and
- Give parents the resources, training, and information they need to help children learn, and teachers and principals the tools they need to engage families.

Nationwide Activities of the Partnership

In addition to the numerous local activities in which Partnership members are involved, many participate in nationwide activities such as the following:

Helping children read throughout the summer and the school year. Known as the *America Reads Challenge*, this activity focuses on maintaining and developing children's reading skills during the summer months and before and after school. Participating children read and write for thirty minutes every day with teenage and adult partners who share a love of reading with them.

Supporting learning right from the beginning of the new school year. Known as *America Goes Back to School*, this activity brings Americans together during the months of August through October to share their experiences and talents with children in schools across the country. Going back to school with children sends the message to participants' year-long commitment to helping students learn and supporting schools in their efforts.

Planting the send of college attendance. Known as *Think College Early*, this initiative helps increase awareness about the importance of attending college and builds support for middle and high school students to take the courses needed to enter college and to be prepared financially.

Keeping kids safe and smart all the time. Supported by the *21st Century Learning Centers* grant program, before- and after-school planned activities expand learning opportunity for children and drug-free environments.

To join and for more information call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit the Web site at : http: pfie.ed.gov

PARTNERSHIP
for Family
Involvement
in Education

PARTNERSHIP FOR FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Partner Registration

To join and receive your Partnership Promise Certificate, enter the information requested below and mail or fax to: Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-8173. Fax: 202-205-9133.

The registration must include a contact person and phone number in order to be processed. The information you provide may be made available by the U.S. Department of Education on the web, and, in any event, is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and will be made available to requestors upon request.

We would like to become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. We commit to family-friendly practices and will work with others to form partnerships that support children's learning.

Name of Partner group or school: _____

Address line 1: _____

Address line 2: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Contact Information:

Head of Organization: _____

Contact Name: _____ E-mail: _____

Is your organization a(n) (Please check one):

☐Family-School Partner ☐Employer for Learning
☐Community Organization ☐Religious Group

OMB Number: 1860-0505 Expiration Date: 10/31/2001

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1860-0505. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 5 minutes per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collection. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy the time estimate or suggestions for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202-4651.

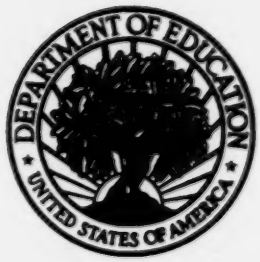
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

United States
Department of Education
ED Pubs
8242–B Sandy Court
Jessup, MD 20794–1398

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, $300

Postage and Fees Paid
U.S. Department of Education
Permit No. G-17

Standard Mail (A)



MIS 2000–6520